







## ENGLISH BRACKETS.

### REVIEW.

*American Notes for General Circulation.*  
By CHARLES DICKENS, 2 vols. London, Chapman and Hall, 1842.—(From the Times.)

Mr. DICKENS possesses the very happy and rare power of placing matters of ordinary occurrence in a new light, detecting and bringing forth to view some fresh feature of interest from the most trite and common topics. Whoever looked upon that common-place personage, "the boot of an inn," or the eyes of the creator of Sam Weller? We have as most of years ago of the advertising schoolmasters in the north of England, was underlooked to do little boys anything perfectly cheap; but how dexterously, and we may add, usefully is the public mind now supplied with the abominations of the system by Box's picture of Dothesbrough-hall, and its rascally proprietor. Again, the opposition under which parsons appear have ground for generations, was generally and vaguely familiar to the public; but we write advisedly when we say that many a magistrate has been led to exercise a more guarded caution in the binding out of workhouse children by a perusal of *Oliver Twist*. Box mostly lays his scenes in what is called low life, and his characters are frequently what the fastidious, or the lady's maid genteel, would designate vulgar; but he never so paints vice or vulgarity that a reader is inflamed with a desire of imitation, or rises from his pages a contaminated race.

Mr. Dickens never labours, like the numerous novelists of the Bulwer school, to make adultery respectable; nor, with those of the Jack Sheppard set, clothes the highwayman and the burglar with the mantle of the hero. Mr. Dickens is not a nice man, in Dean Swift's acceptance of the world; he is not to be driven by a whiff of tobacco-smoke, or a coarse jest, or an unclean gesture, from the contemplation of such phases of human nature whence instinctively man is derived. He has a keen perception of the ridiculous, and wit to show them off as it is; but his satire has a moral, a taunting effect, and while his hand wields the whip he impresses a heart to help the poor.

Impressed with this idea of Mr. Dickens's acute mind and kindly nature, and having long admired the wholesome character and beneficial tendency of his writings, we took up his *American Notes* with a full presentiment that we should honour them; we anticipated amusement, and we have not been disappointed.

Mr. Dickens set forth for America with good-natured determination not to be offended with those peculiarities of manner which ruffle most English travellers so much; and not only was his own mental comfort considerably promoted by this wise resolve, but his notes are more cheerful, and also truthful, in consequence.

"I should undoubtedly be offended," he remarks, with reference to an American landlord, "by such proceedings at home, because there they are not the custom, and where they are not they would be impertinencies; but in America, the only desire of a good-natured fellow of this kind is to treat his guests hospitably and well; and I had no more right, and I can truly say no more disposition, to measure his conduct by English rule and standard, than I had to offend with him for not being of the exact status which would qualify him for admission into the Queen's Guards."

With this considerate good-nature, however, Box does not lack a keen sense of the ludicrous absurdity of this national inquisitiveness, nor will it touch us off smarting, as the following laughable sketch will show:

"There was a man on board this boat with a light-fresh-coloured face, and a pepper-and-salt suit of clothes, who was the most inquisitive fellow that can possibly be imagined. He never spoke otherwise than interrogatively. He was an embodied inquiry. Sitting down or standing up, still or moving, walking the deck or taking his meals, there he was, with a great note of interrogation in each eye, two in his cocked ears, two more in his turned-up nose and chin, at least half-a-dozen more about the corners of his mouth, and the largest one of all in his hair, which was bristled partly off his forehead in a flaxen clump. Every button in his clothes said, 'Eh! What's that? Did you speak?' Say that again, will you? He was always wide awake, like the enchanted bride who drove her husband frantic; always restless; always thirsting for answers; perpetually seeking and never finding. There never was such a curious man. I wore a fur coat at that time, and before we were well clear of the wharf, he questioned me concerning it, as to its price, and where I bought it, and whether it was well made; and when it was weighed, he said, 'What's that? Is it a French watch? And where it got it, and how I got it, and how it went, and where the hole was, and when I wound it, every night or every morning, and whether I did, what then? Where I had been to last, and where was I going next, and where was I going after that; and last I seen the President, and what did he say, and what did I say, and what did he say when I had said that? Eh? Lor now! Do tell!' Vol. II, p. 191.

We cannot follow Mr. Dickens further in his tour round New York, but strongly recommend every one to do so who has a relish for lively description interspersed with burburs of kindly feeling such as are displayed in the conclusion of the above quotation. We now turn to Philadelphia—

"We reached Philadelphia late at night, looking out of my chamber window, before going to bed, I saw on the opposite side of the way a handsome building of white marble, which had a mournful, ghost-like aspect dreary to behold. I attributed this to the sombre influence of the night, but on entering the room looking round, I was filled with the most awful apprehension; it was a perfect picture of Justice retired from business; for want of customers, her sword and scales sold off, napping comfortably, with her legs up in the table." But we should dismiss our readers with a very inadequate notion of Mr. Dickens's merits as an observant traveller, were we to present him merely in his mournful mood; for all the important institutions of America he expatiates seriously and well. His description of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for Blind at Boston (Vol. II, p. 67—105) is too good to extract, and too beautiful to be omitted.

"It is a full of the sweetest feelings, and that cannot fail to give a harder heart than we possess, who can sit without tears, not tears of icky sensibility, but tears which, while they soften the feelings, stimulate the heart to active charity. We can bestow the same, and for a like reason, on the chapter upon Lowell and its Factory System. (Vol. II, p. 152, 161.) We would that the cotton lords of Leeds and Manchester would peruse and ponder this chapter which Mr. Dickens thus calmly, but solemnly, concludes:—

"I have carefully abstained from drawing a comparison between these factories and those of our own land. The contrast would be a strong one, for it would be between the good and evil, the living light and deepest shadow. I abstain from it, because I deem it just to do so. But I only the more earnestly adjure all those whose eyes may rest on these pages, to peruse the history of Justice retired from business; for want of customers, her sword and scales sold off, napping comfortably, with their legs up in the table."

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